

The Behavior Change Process: Staying on Course

It's important to understand that changing your behavior doesn't necessarily happen in a straight line. You'll probably move back and forth (or up and down, like a yo-yo) between the different stages of change before getting to the final maintenance level for the health habits you desire. This article offers 5 ways to keep moving forward toward your behavior change goals.

Be flexible

It's common to encounter surprises on the way to achieving a behavior change goal. Even the most well thought out plan usually requires some adjustments. By giving yourself room to take risks, make mistakes, and apply new knowledge, you'll be able to take challenges in stride and come out stronger than ever.

Anticipate obstacles

Occasional setbacks occur no matter how carefully you've constructed your plan. Preparing for potential obstacles is an important key to overcoming them. List strategies for dealing with roadblocks before they come up. If you have an off day, take time out and determine how to get back on track. What got in the way? How will you deal

with it differently next time? Allow yourself to be human — learn from your setbacks and keep moving forward. And remember, a slip is just a slip, not a failure.

Monitor your progress

When you first start making changes, you may progress rapidly. Although motivating, this also can be misleading and just plain discouraging when the pace levels off.

Successful behavior change typically occurs in a roller coaster pattern — some high points, some low points, but steady movement toward the goal. Look over the steps you've taken at this point. Are there any patterns? Can you identify triggers in your environment that cause you to fall back into old habits? Keeping tabs on yourself as you go is a good way to identify problem areas, and correct them as necessary to prevent relapse.

Reward yourself

You're striving to permanently change lifestyle habits, and that's no easy task. Be patient; it will take some time before new habits feel natural. Be your own cheerleader — supportive and encouraging, focusing on your achievements rather than your setbacks —

and give yourself the recognition you deserve. Make a list of tangible rewards that appeal to you, and indulge yourself regularly as you carry out your plan. Rewards should be prompt, realistic, and in line with your healthy lifestyle. Treat yourself to:

- New music or artwork
- Sports, concert, or theater tickets
- A massage
- Workout gear
- New cookbook or kitchen gadget
- A bubble bath
- Sports equipment
- New clothes
- A round of golf.

Visualize success

Creating an image of success in your mind can be a powerful tool for getting through the rough times and building motivation, self-confidence, and commitment. Take a quiet moment to close your eyes and see yourself engaged in new, more positive health habits. Picture yourself reaching your goal and enjoying the rewards of a healthier lifestyle.

For more help with the behavior change process, contact:

